

House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health  
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Chairman Payne, Ranking Member Smith, and Esteemed Committee Members: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the important challenge of climate change in Africa, the solutions within reach, and the key leadership that the United States has played and remains poised to fulfill across the African continent and extending to the majestic island of Madagascar.

I have the honor of speaking today on behalf of Conservation International (CI), where I serve as Senior Vice President overseeing our global initiatives in Climate Change, Freshwater Conservation, Food and Health Security. Conservation International is a U.S.-based non-governmental organization with some 23 years of experience developing and achieving sustainable conservation and development solutions in over 40 countries throughout the developing world. Conservation International is committed to helping societies adopt a more sustainable approach to development – one that considers and values nature at every turn. Building upon a strong foundation of science, partnership and field demonstration, CI empowers societies to responsibly and sustainably care for nature for the well-being of humanity. We have achieved our success in close partnership with African nations, local communities, scientific and civil society partners – and with the US government, which has been at the forefront of conservation and development progress in Madagascar, nations of the Congo Basin, and Southern and West Africa.

I would like to salute the testimony provided by Ambassador Rajaobelina. The social, economic and environmental challenges faced in Madagascar are replicated across the continent. Crises in food and water scarcity, health and conflict will be further exacerbated by climate change, leading to substantial humanitarian impacts that will have profound implications for regional and global security.

The urgency of climate change as a global security issue has been consistently highlighted in recent studies and public statements by leading military, intelligence, and security agencies. Climate change could have significant geopolitical impacts around the world — contributing to poverty, environmental degradation, spurring conflict and further weakening fragile governments (DoD 2010, NIC 2008, CNA 2007). “While climate change alone does not cause conflict, it may act as an accelerant of instability or conflict, placing a burden to respond on civilian institutions and militaries around the world” (DoD 2010).

Recent science highlights the magnitude of the challenges that Africa will face. A consensus model of climate change suggests that Rwanda’s current climate envelopes will disappear entirely by 2100 (Tabor and Williams 2010). Under “business as usual,” mean temperature changes in West Africa are projected to increase some 5 degrees Celsius above 2000 levels by the end of this century (IPCC 2007). The already-stressed natural resource sector across Africa will be further complicated by climate change, which threatens to exacerbate resource scarcity, endanger food security, increase extreme natural events such as droughts, and heighten the vulnerability of local populations, particularly the rural poor.

By increasing the daunting challenges of reducing poverty, conserving natural ecosystems and sustaining peace, climate change moves the goalposts. On security issues like climate change, U.S. leadership will be critical to leveraging competing and divisive views to find solutions (NIC 2008).

The U.S. government has led the world in investing in the fair and sustainable management of natural resources, through its many agencies working internationally. Throughout much of the developing world, U.S. government programs have reduced poverty, sparked economic development, increased biodiversity and natural resource conservation, strengthened governance, and reduced conflict. The knowledge, practice and stability that the USG has created in Namibia, Madagascar, the Sahelian countries, and the Congo Basin through its flagship projects has no equal.

Through these efforts, as well as sound science and practical field experience, the United States and NGOs like Conservation International (with its more than 1200 global partners) have the tools necessary to help countries across the African continent adapt to these changes.

Scientific assessment of the vulnerability of natural ecosystems and biodiversity provides a basis for understanding and acting to mitigate the most catastrophic impacts of climate change and to build the adaptive capacity of human and natural communities. Productive and resilient natural ecosystems are essential to adapting to climate change – measures to ensure the conservation of natural ecosystems and their vital services, such as freshwater provision, pollination, and natural disaster mitigation will moderate the impacts of climate change on human communities. Natural ecosystems are the source of livelihoods for rural, poor and vulnerable communities throughout Africa – from drinking water, and food products to fertile soils and productive fisheries. CI's long history of conservation success in Africa, supported by U.S. government efforts from Liberia to Madagascar, provides the very basis for securing the natural ecosystems critical for climate adaptation. We have the knowledge and the experience. U.S. leadership can ensure that this urgent, cost-effective climate solution is seized this decade—not through massive investment in infrastructure or relief efforts, but by sustaining a successful track record of nature conservation across the continent.

Countries across the globe are considering measures to transition to low carbon development for a sustainable future. Throughout Africa, from war-torn, developing states such as Liberia to emerging leaders such as Rwanda and South Africa, national governments and civil society are working jointly to forge a joint path to sustainable, “green” economies. A global solution to the climate crisis offers an immediate entry to this sustainable development pathway for developing economies. Reducing emissions from deforestation and logging (REDD+) constitutes approximately 1/6 of current greenhouse gas emission globally – and cutting deforestation in half by 2020 offers 1/3 of the cost effective, technologically available emissions reduction options.

In addition REDD+ offers an unprecedented financial opportunity, providing capital for economic development based upon a global willingness to pay for preserving natural forests. A case in point -- at the request of the government of Liberia, CI analyzed the potential for REDD+ to contribute to their national economy. The net benefits of ~30 million USD per year (about 3% of GDP) at very modest prices of (5 USD/ton CO<sup>2</sup>e) is only feasible if upfront costs of ~30 million USD /yr over the next few years are covered from external sources. These costs relate to retooling the forestry and agriculture sectors and, importantly, establishing governance structures that will allow development benefits to be delivered at scale. The U.S. Government is contemplating a 120M USD investment in agriculture in Liberia which, in combination with a bilateral program supporting REDD+, would provide the platform

for stimulating a transition to low carbon development and a green economy, in which green means not only ecologically friendly, but also economically prosperous.

Elsewhere in Africa the U.S. private sector is already engaged in providing a solution. CI has secured agreements with two major U.S. companies—Dell and The Disney Corporation—to support communities in delivering forest-based CO<sup>2</sup> emissions reductions in DRC and Madagascar. Dell is able to provide this support, in Madagascar, through the service that CI has given to the communities and government in establishing local governance structures. The Disney Corporation is investing in eastern DRC, through the same relationship. Public-private partnerships offer important means of stimulating investment by building robust governance, mitigating investment risk and enhancing market security. The support of the USG through instruments such as the Global Development Alliance would greatly enhance development of this emerging market, building conformity and integrity of emissions reduction assets, controlling harmful speculation and corruption, and stimulating private investment at a scale necessary to establish a path towards sustainable development in these and other African economies. Ultimately, through both government and the private sector, this will pave the way for U.S. participation in a robust and fair emissions reduction market that will simultaneously provide major development opportunities for some of the poorest people on earth.

These measures are within our reach. We have the knowledge and capacity, and the U.S. government has built a track record of success in conserving natural ecosystems, stimulating economic growth, sound governance and market solutions to development crises. With resolute actions to provide immediate technical and financial assistance, U.S. partnership can assist African nations to resolutely confront an uncertain future with less risk and greater resilience, built upon the conservation of natural ecosystems that underpin their cultures, economies and security. Chairman and honorable members of the committee, I thank you for this distinct opportunity.

**Citations:**

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